

Democrats have been quick to blame tea party conservatives for dragging down budget talks. But perhaps they should train their fire at Rep. Jim Jordan.

While there is no shortage of firebrands making noise, the Ohioan's careful stewardship of the Republican Study Committee has won him a loyal following among colleagues and with that the ability to deliver — or deny — votes for leadership.

In the continuing resolution debate, it was the RSC that called on Speaker John Boehner (R-Ohio) to push for deeper cuts and the inclusion of policy riders, positions Boehner took.

In an interview, Jordan said his lobbying efforts helped Republicans win a better deal and force Senate Democrats to agree to bigger cuts.

"I'd like to think RSC had a big impact in initially moving the number in this CR debate," he said. He pointed out that the committee called on Boehner to seek more than the \$32 billion in cuts he first proposed.

"We all went to work in the Conference, and to the leadership's credit, they liked it, they supported it, and we'll go to x-plus in savings for the taxpayers," Jordan said. "I think we had an impact."

Jordan, a two-time NCAA wrestling champion and former state legislator, has an understated style that reflects his Midwestern roots. Elected in 2006, he came to Congress in the same class as Majority Whip Kevin McCarthy (R-Calif.) and enjoys a good working relationship with Boehner, a fellow Ohioan. While Jordan said the RSC "tries to be as helpful as possible" within the larger GOP Conference, he makes no apologies for its ultimate goal.

"We have a mission and a task, and it's again to help make policy as conservative as possible. And that's what we try to do every single day," he said.

The measure of Jordan's influence can be seen in votes on the short-term CR over the past five weeks, especially when compared to that of high-profile firebrand Rep. Michele Bachmann (R-Minn.). Jordan voted for the first short-term CR, but Bachmann opposed it along with five other Republicans. After Jordan announced he would vote against the second short-term CR last month, a total of 54 Republicans joined him in casting "no" votes.

Several RSC members said Jordan has taken the right approach to leading the group with Republicans in their newfound majority.

"I think he's taking the right tone and tenor in the debate," Rep. Jason Chaffetz (R-Utah) said. "He's passionate about fiscal issues. He is also deeply concerned about some of the social conservative issues. His heart is in the right place."

The RSC's membership hovers around 175, or nearly two-thirds of the GOP Conference. The group was founded in the 1970s as a place where "like-minded conservatives can coordinate their activities and stand on the basis of principle," according to its website.

Rep. John Campbell said the RSC's role in the Conference has changed because of its size.

"I do think the fact that [the group] is larger makes the RSC somewhat more influential," the California Republican said. "The objective of the RSC then and, I think, now is to move the leadership to the right."

Campbell noted that the coalition's success in pushing the Conference to the right is also because there are RSC members in leadership, including Majority Leader Eric Cantor (Va.) and Policy Committee Chairman Tom Price (Ga.), a former RSC chairman.

"I don't think anybody has ever accused Eric Cantor of being squishy on many things," Campbell said.

The CR is not the only legislative fight the RSC has weighed in on this year; Members thwarted consideration of legislation to extend expiring Trade Adjustment Assistance programs in February. Just last week, Jordan and Rep. Scott Garrett (N.J.) introduced an RSC budget proposal that reaches further than Budget Chairman Paul Ryan's (R-Wis.) draft, which was also unveiled last week.

While the group's influence has been on display the past several weeks, it is not a monolithic voting bloc.

"I see them more as an ideas machine, a place where you can share, debate ideas," Conference Vice Chairwoman Cathy McMorris Rodgers (Wash.) said. "We have shared goals. I guess the question is more related to how fast we are going to get to where we want to get."

Jordan's biggest challenge is yet to come: House Republicans still must pass a bill to increase the debt limit, an unpleasant task for Congress that in other eras was done with little political debate. Now, however, many conservatives in the House campaigned against raising the debt limit, and it is a volatile political issue. Several RSC members have said that they will oppose any increase in the debt limit, while others might be persuaded if more spending cuts are part of the deal.

Of course, not all Republicans applaud the RSC's influence as the Conference tries to navigate as the new majority party in Washington. One moderate lawmaker complained that the RSC focused too much on the CR debate and prevented the party from turning to other issues, particularly the upcoming budget debate.

"I'm hoping that going through this exercise has made them understand, as Boehner says, we're only one-half of a third of the government," the Member said.

Asked about that concern, Jordan simply said: "I would argue the RSC is all about doing what the American people sent us here to do. That is our focus."